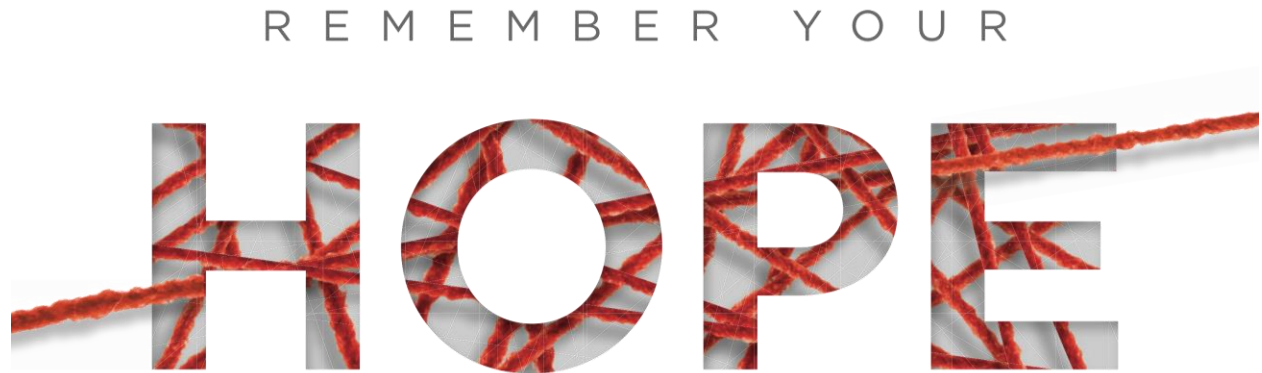


Lesson 4: 1 Peter 2:13–25

Hook



Main Point: When we are persecuted for doing good, we are suffering as Jesus did.

Whom do you follow? Considering your social networking accounts, which influencers do you keep a close eye on? Below are the most followed/liked/subscribed to influencers on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook:

Instagram

Cristiano Ronaldo (149 million)ⁱ

Twitter

Barack Obama (109 million)ⁱⁱ

Facebook

Cristiano Ronaldo (122 million)ⁱⁱⁱ

The first social networking site, Classmates, arrived on the scene in 1995. Classmates launched as a list of school affiliations and featured member profiles and friends lists. Others soon followed the platform: Friendster (2002), LinkedIn (2003), MySpace (2003), and Facebook (2004).^{iv}

Teacher, break your Bible Fellowship into small groups. Challenge them to think through influencers/leaders throughout history and answer this question: If social networking had existed throughout history, what person would be the most followed/liked/subscribed to of all time?

Q: Whom do you enjoy following on social networking sites?

Q: Have any of the influencers you follow ever caused you to change a behavior? What behavior did you adjust and why?

Q: Considering the example of Jesus, which of His teachings do you find most difficult to emulate/follow?

Book

Main Point: When we are persecuted for doing good, we are suffering as Jesus did.

Text Summary: As believers, we are to do good no matter what everyone else around us is doing. We are to live subject to the human authorities in our lives. We are to honor everyone and fear God. If we suffer persecution for doing good, we are following in Jesus's footsteps.

1 Peter 2:13–17 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Believers are called to be subject to the human authorities in their lives.

Q: Why are believers commanded to obey secular human authorities (see also Romans 13:1–5)? Is there any point at which we should *not* obey human authorities?

Q: How does honoring human authorities portray a positive witness in the world? How does honoring *everyone* portray a positive witness in the world?

Nero, who ruled A.D. 54–68, was emperor at the time Peter was writing (A.D. 60–64), and it was under his persecution that Peter was later martyred. At this point, Nero had not yet started officially killing Christians. The first official persecution of Christians organized by the government took place under Nero in A.D. 64 after the Great Fire of Rome.^v The believers in Asia Minor to whom Peter was writing were suffering from localized persecution, even though it had not yet spread officially to the entire Roman Empire by order of the Emperor.^{vi}

Peter does tell them to honor the emperor (v. 17), but he also says to “honor everyone” (v. 17), thereby putting the emperor on the same level as everyone else, giving him no special right to greater honor just because he was the emperor. Peter upheld the idea that we should be submissive to human authorities (Romans 13), while subtly stating that the emperor, though he claimed to be divine, was *not* equal to God. We do not honor the emperor because he is divine. We respect human authorities *out of fear of the Lord*—“for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13), because if God is sovereign that means He has those authorities in place for a reason (Romans 13:1–5).

With short, direct sentences at the end of the paragraph (1 Peter 2:17), Peter makes a very intentional contrast between the way we are to treat God versus the emperor:

- Honor everyone
- Love the brotherhood (other believers)
- Fear God
- Honor the emperor

Peter goes from “honor” to “love” to “fear” and back to “honor,” making a sharp distinction between the authority of the emperor and the authority of God. We are to honor the emperor because we are to honor everyone. But we are to *fear* God alone.^{vii}

As Jesus said in the Gospels, we are not to fear *any* man but only God. Jesus’ words to His disciples are very apropos here, as Peter is writing to people who fear persecution and even death by the emperor. “Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Believers are to respect their human authorities unless it comes to the point that obeying them would mean disobeying God, like Daniel and his friends during the Babylonian exile. Their ultimate authority, the one that really matters, is God.

These persecuted believers needed to know that even though they should be subject to the emperor, God was their ultimate authority. There would soon come a day when they would have to choose whether to deny their faith before Nero. They would need the strength and conviction that comes from a healthy fear of God.

Q: Imagine a situation at work in which your boss was asking you to do something unethical or even illegal, something you knew God wouldn’t approve of. How can you respond as a believer in a way that honors your boss without giving in to doing what is wrong?

Q: What are some specific ways you can show honor to your boss or other authority figures in your life this week?

1 Peter 2:18–20 [Read]

Talking Point 2: When we endure suffering for doing good, it is a gracious thing in the eyes of God. But that does *not* mean Christians are commanded to just quietly suffer abuse.

Q: Why would God encourage His people to be subject to the hands of an unjust master?

Q: Why is enduring unjust suffering “a gracious thing”?

This passage does not condone slavery or abuse. [For a full discussion of what the New Testament says about slavery, see Appendix A.] First, let’s be clear—God does not condone the master’s behavior in this situation. Peter explicitly calls the master’s actions *unjust*. The focus of this passage isn’t on the actions of the master, but the actions of the servant. How the person who is being mistreated should respond. Note that the word used here is actually “servant,” not “slave.” The Greek word is *oiketes*, the word for a household servant, not a slave (*doulos*). Thus, it has a much broader application than just the context of slavery, and a great majority of the early Church would fit in this category. One could apply this principle broadly today to

anyone working for an unjust boss, especially because in verse 19, Peter speaks more generally of anytime someone endures suffering unjustly, not just in the context of a master/servant, boss/employee relationship.^{viii}

Paul tells the master, Philemon, to treat his slave, Onesimus, like a brother in Christ (Philemon 16). He tells masters to treat their servants with respect and love (Ephesians 6:9). These were radical commands for this time period, when slaves were considered nothing but property. But these passages are talking about situations in which both master and slave are believers, and both are trying to do the right thing. This passage in 1 Peter is even more difficult. The question here is, how does a Christian respond when a person in authority over him is mistreating him? Does Scripture command that Christians just let themselves be abused?

There are churches who teach that they should, and even use this passage to justify telling Christian married people they should, in submission, quietly allow their spouses to abuse them. But that is not what Peter meant, nor is it what Jesus meant when He told his disciples to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). Yes, Jesus did allow Himself to be beaten and killed without saying a word, but there were other times when He fled those who were trying to kill Him (John 7:1; 10:39; et. al.). John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrestled with those two strands in the Bible of how to deal with persecution:

He that flies, has warrant to do so; he that stands, has warrant to do so. Yea, the same man may both fly and stand, as the call and working of God with his heart may be. Moses fled (Exodus 2:15); Moses stood (Hebrews 11:27). David fled (1 Samuel 19:12); David stood (1 Samuel 24:8). Jeremiah fled (Jeremiah 37:11–12); Jeremiah stood (Jeremiah 38:17). Christ withdrew himself (Luke 9:10); Christ stood (John 18:1–8). Paul fled (2 Corinthians 11:33); Paul stood (Acts 20:22–23). Do not fly out of a slavish fear, but rather because flying is an ordinance of God, opening a door for the escape of some, which door is opened by God's providence, and the escape countenanced by God's Word (Matthew 10:23).^{ix}

This is not a command to stay in an abusive marriage—or even a toxic friendship or work relationship—and continue to let yourself be abused so you can be like Jesus.

Peter is teaching about patiently enduring suffering for the sake of the Gospel, but he is specifically focusing on the contrast between suffering *for sinning* and suffering for *doing good* (1 Peter 2:19–20). The “good” Peter is talking about here is a moral good, doing the right thing even if it means negative consequences to yourself. Consider Peter's own experience. He was commanded by the authorities to stop preaching the Gospel, but he refused and was flogged. He actually did *not* submit to the authority over him, and he was unjustly punished for it. That is the kind of situation Peter is referencing here. Biblical counselor Leslie Vernick responds to those who use this passage to demand that an abused wife submit to her husband by saying,

“In the same way, when a wife refuses to submit to her husband’s sinful behavior, or stands up for her children who are being mistreated, or refuses to sign a dishonest income tax report, or calls 911 when her husband is threatening to harm her or himself, she is doing good even if it doesn’t feel good to her spouse. Her behavior honors God, protects her children, and does what is in the best interest of her spouse. (It is never in someone’s best interests to enable sin to flourish.)”^x

Peter says it is a “gracious thing” when we suffer for doing good without retaliation, without letting the situation lead us to respond with sin (v. 18). This is what it means to “endure sorrows while suffering unjustly” (v. 19). Peter calls us to respond with grace and love, no matter how we are treated. If the abused wife shouts abusive words back at her husband or retaliates in some other way (not just defending herself or doing what she can to get out or reporting him to authorities), she no longer “does good” but lets the abuser push her into sinning herself. If you are in a toxic work environment, “doing good” would be going through the proper channels, to bring justice and prevent the same thing from happening to someone else—not badmouthing your boss behind his back or figuring out some underhanded way to get him fired. We are not to repay evil with evil (3:9) but to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). We are not to seek our own revenge, but leave it to the Lord (12:19). When you are wronged, make sure *you* stay in the right. When we endure unjust suffering for the Lord’s sake, for the sake of doing good, it is a “gracious thing” because it is a picture of grace, of the Gospel.

Q: Imagine a situation where you are being mistreated at work. What kind of impression does it give other people if you go around badmouthing the person responsible instead of going through the proper channels to report the situation?

Q: Imagine it is a friend who is mistreating you. How can you stand up for yourself and try to remedy the situation without sinning yourself?

1 Peter 2:21–25 [Read]

Talking Point 3: When we suffer for doing good, we are being like Christ.

Q: Why did Jesus allow Himself to die?

Q: How did Jesus have the self-control to endure the taunting and mockery without saying anything back?

Q: What kind of example does this give us about how to respond when we’re persecuted for our faith?

Peter points to Jesus as our model for enduring suffering without retaliation. “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued trusting himself to him who judges justly” (v. 23). Instead of seeking His own revenge, He left that up to God (Romans 12:19). As we said above, Jesus went willingly to the Cross, but there were other times when people were trying to kill Him that He fled because it wasn’t yet time for Him to die (John 7:1; 10:39; et. al.).

Peter had a similar experience. When Herod put James to death for his faith, he also arrested Peter, planning to do the same to him, but he was waiting until after the Passover to do it publicly as an example to the people. But the Church prayed earnestly for Peter, and an angel appeared and broke him out of prison. Peter didn’t stay in jail so he could prove how faithful he was by dying as a martyr. He followed the angel (Acts 12:1–11). Peter and Paul both followed the leading of the Spirit in all that they did. Sometimes the Spirit told them to endure persecution, sometimes to flee it. The key was that they were willing to follow the Spirit either way. They were willing to endure suffering if that was what God called them to do. They were willing to endure flogging or prison or death for their faith. Peter said to the religious rulers in Jerusalem, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19–20). They were willing to endure the human consequences for following God.

Jesus is our example, both in His life and in His death (1 Peter 2:21). He committed no sin at all, yet was found guilty and executed by human courts. He was completely innocent, yet died a criminal’s death. It was the most unfair situation ever, yet He stayed silent. In this way, He fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7), whom Peter has been quoting throughout this letter. Jesus suffered it all for you and for me so that we might live (v. 24). Jesus endured unjust suffering to bring about the Gospel.

There *will* be times in our lives when we are also faced with unjust suffering. There *may* even be times we are called to endure it for the sake of the Gospel, as when Peter was arrested and thrown in jail (Acts 4:3), or when he was beaten (Acts 5:40), or when he was finally killed as a martyr under Nero. Those are the kinds of situations in which God says to stand firm, hold on, and endure the persecution for the sake of the Gospel, clinging to the hope of your future inheritance. It is in those times that we have to reassure ourselves that we are sharing with Jesus in His suffering now, but one day we will share with Him in His glory (Romans 8:17; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13).

For most of us here in the United States, this kind of persecution is outside the realm of our experience and difficult to realistically imagine. We aren’t faced with the real possibility of persecution as the original hearers of Peter’s letter were. But in many places around the world right now, believers face very real religious persecution. In fact, in May 2019, the British

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Jeremy Hunt, said Christian persecution around the world has reached “near genocide levels.” Hunt said Christian persecution has grown in the Middle East, southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and east Asia. And while some people of other religions also suffer persecution, Christians are the most persecuted religious group (80 percent).^{xi}

Q: Have you ever suffered persecution for your faith, even in a small way (not prison or death)? Describe what that situation was like and how you responded.

Q: Share any encouraging or incredible stories you have heard of Christians who have found joy in persecution and suffering.

Q: How is God calling you to respond to the growth of Christian persecution around the world? How is He leading you to pray? How is He leading you to act?

Q: How can your Bible Fellowship get involved in helping persecuted Christians around the world?

Took

Main Point: When we are persecuted for doing good, we are suffering as Jesus did.

Open Doors USA tracks stories of persecution around the world:

A woman in India watches as her sister is dragged off by Hindu nationalists. She doesn't know if her sister is alive or dead. A man in a North Korean prison camp is shaken awake after being beaten unconscious; the beatings begin again. A woman in Nigeria runs for her life. She has escaped from Boko Haram, who kidnapped her. She is pregnant, and when she returns home, her community will reject her and her baby. A group of children are laughing and talking as they come down to their church's sanctuary after eating together. Instantly, many of them are killed by a bomb blast. It's Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka.

These people don't live in the same region or even on the same continent. But they share an important characteristic: They are all Christians, and they suffer because of their faith. While Christian persecution takes many forms, it is defined as any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Jesus Christ. From Sudan to Russia, from Nigeria to North Korea, from Colombia to India, followers of Christianity are targeted for their faith. They are attacked; they are discriminated against at work and at school; they risk sexual violence, torture, arrest and much more. In just the last year, there have been:

- Over 245 million Christians living in places where they experience high levels of persecution
- 4,305 Christians killed for their faith
- 1,847 churches and other Christian buildings attacked
- 3,150 believers detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned

These numbers are heart-breaking. And yet, they do not tell the whole story. James 1:2–4 says “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” That joy is what we see when we hear and work with Christians all over the world who suffer because of they serve Jesus. God cares for His people, and He will never leave or forsake them.^{xii}

It is absolutely incredible to hear stories of believers who are being persecuted for their faith, yet find hope and joy in their suffering. It seems unimaginable to us, but it happens every day in other parts of the world. Our response cannot only be to be thankful we are not in that situation. We must pray for our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ who are suffering around the world and consider ways we can help. You can volunteer with and donate to ministries that work with persecuted Christians. You can write letters to encourage persecuted

believers, advocate to our government to work toward change in those countries, and raise awareness among your community.

There is much we can do, but the biggest thing we can do is pray. Pray for freedom, protection, strength, encouragement and love for these persecuted believers. And pray that God will use their suffering as a witness of the Gospel to others. Remember how Paul was able to witness to his jailers in Philippi (Acts 16) and in Rome (Philippians 1:12–14)? He wrote that he found joy in his imprisonment because it served to advance the Gospel even more. This is how we find joy in persecution, by seeing the bigger picture of the mission, just as Jesus did with His death on the Cross. This is how, when we are faced with suffering and persecution, we can say, as Jesus did, “Not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

CHALLENGES

THINK: *How can my suffering bring God glory?* We may not all suffer in the same way these persecuted Christians are, but we all go through times of suffering. How can you find purpose in your suffering? How can it mold you into who God wants you to be and/or advance the Gospel? How can the way you respond to suffering be a witness to others of God’s grace and love?

PRAY: *For persecuted believers around the world.* Pray for strength, encouragement and love for their enemies. Pray for freedom and change in these countries. Pray for their lives to be a witness to the love of Jesus and the Gospel. You can download this booklet for more information on each country: https://www.opendoorsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2019_World_Watch_List_Booklet.pdf. Or download this app to guide you in how to pray: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/prayerapp/>.

ACT: *Write a letter.* Write an encouraging letter to a persecuted believer. Be sure to include Scripture. <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/take-action/advocacy/letter-writing>.

ⁱ <https://www.businessinsider.com/instagram-top-50-people#6-kylie-jenner-45>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/most-twitter-followers/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.dailydot.com/upstream/most-followers-facebook/>

^{iv} <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/then-and-now-a-history-of-social-networking-sites/>

^v W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 319.

^{vi} Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 32.

^{vii} Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 127–131.

^{viii} Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, *Tyndale Bible Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1968), 114.

^{ix} John Bunyan, “Seasonable Counsels” *The Works of John Bunyan, Volume 2* (Pinnacle Press, 2017), 726.

^x Leslie Vernick, “Abused Wives: Called to Suffer?” *Association of Biblical Counselors* - <https://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/association-of-biblical-counselors/abused-wives-called-to-suffer.html>

^{xi} Patrick Wintour, “Persecution of Christians ‘Coming Close to Genocide’ in Middle East” *The Guardian*, May 2, 2019 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/02/persecution-driving-christians-out-of-middle-east-report>

^{xii} <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/> (Statistics from 2019 World Watch list reporting period, November 1, 2017–October 31, 2018)